

# College Planning Timeline

9<sup>th</sup> Grade - 12<sup>th</sup> Grade Planning for Students and Parents



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**CPG**

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# Contents

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(click on the links below to navigate to that section)

[Introduction](#)

[Grade 9](#)

[Grade 10](#)

Grade 11

[Fall](#)

[Winter](#)

[Spring/Summer](#)

Grade 12

[Fall](#)

[Winter](#)

[Spring/Summer](#)

[Freshman Year and Beyond](#)

# College Planning Timeline

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Planning for college is a process that should take place throughout a student's high school career, not just during junior and senior year. Decisions made throughout a high school career can affect a student's chances at getting into a dream school and getting scholarship money. Grades, extracurricular activities, even summer jobs, affect the resume of a college applicant.

This college planning timeline is to help parents and their high school students stay on track throughout the process. Check in to make sure you are up to date at different checkpoints throughout a high school career. Following this timeline will increase the chances of getting into a better school and decrease stress towards the end of the process.

## Grade 9

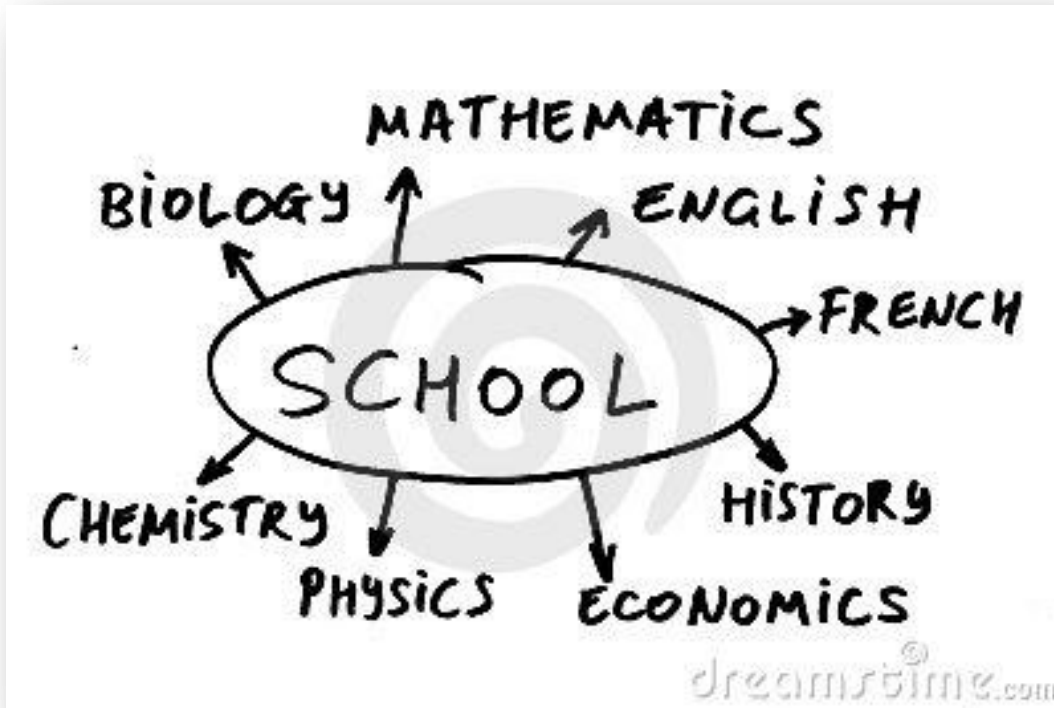
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### Students

- **Choose the right courses.** Meet with your guidance counselor, especially in the fall and spring, to plan ahead and make sure you'll have enough time to take math, science, and all of the classes college admissions officers want to see. Although Advanced Placement classes typically come later in high school (junior and senior year), keep in mind to take as many AP classes as possible.
- **Participate in extracurricular activities.** Extracurricular activities are becoming increasingly important to colleges. Colleges want to see more than just an SAT score and grade point average, they want to see well-rounded students with interests and activities beyond the classroom. However, extracurricular activities go beyond the college application process alone. They are a good way to make friends, find interests, and provide an opportunity to take on leadership roles. Leadership roles are also important for the college application process.
- **Discover your interests.** Find out what's involved in various occupations, and explore the options that interest you. Your guidance counselor may have a computer program for researching career interests. Keep an open mind: think more about what you like to do than a profession specifically.

**What extracurricular activities are you interested in?**

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_ 3. \_\_\_\_\_
- **Seek summer employment or volunteer work.** Summer employment is more than just a way to make money, it also gives you the opportunity to gain experience in a number of different job functions and situations. Also consider volunteer work in a cause you feel strongly about or a field you are interested in. Volunteering shows initiative and leadership.
- **Work hard at your classes**



- **Protect and manage your social networks!** This is a newer part to the college application process. College admission officers are now able to find out more about an applicant based on their Facebook, MySpace, and other social network profiles. Make sure to increase your privacy settings, know who your “friends” are, and be away of the photos and content that make up your profile.

## Parents

- **Review your college savings plan and your student’s personal budget.** Your first “base year” for college aid begins January 1 of junior year.
- **Encourage.** Freshman year can be a crazy time for your children. This is an important year in which students can develop a group of friends, find

activities and sports they really enjoy, and find different subject matters that interest them. We say to encourage your children during this year: encourage them to pursue what they like, hang out with the right people, and work hard in classes.

- **Social networks management!** Parents: make sure that your students are aware of the exposure caused by their Facebook pages and other social networks. According to [Kaplan](#), 82 percent of the 386 admissions officers surveyed indicated that their respective schools used Facebook, "to recruit prospective students." Encourage your students to run their profiles through "[Socioclean](#)":



The advertisement banner for Socioclean features a blue background with white and yellow text. At the top left is the 'socioclean' logo. To the right, it says 'Understand and Protect your Social Reputation'. The main headline reads 'Scan, Clean and Secure your Social Network Content.' Below this is a yellow button that says 'Try it FREE'. On the right side, there is a circular graphic containing social media icons for Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and a group of people. At the bottom, there are four service icons with descriptions: 'One Stop Shop' (briefcase icon), 'Clean Social Profile' (computer monitor icon), 'Social Analytics and Trending' (bar chart icon), and 'Safe and Secure' (lock icon).

## Grade 10

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### Students

- **Choose the right courses.** Set up a meeting with your guidance counselor and make sure you're on track with courses requested by colleges and those needed for graduation.
- **Consider taking the PSAT.** Some students, particularly those in honors classes, practice for standardized tests by taking the Preliminary SAT sophomore year. The PSAT is given in October. Students can also take the SAT subject tests in June and take them again junior year. Ask your guidance counselor for more information.



- **Continue to work hard in school and participate in activities.**

**What extracurricular activities do you participate in?**

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_ 3. \_\_\_\_\_

- **Attend college fairs.** High schools have college fairs, but there are more extensive college fairs held independently. Ask your guidance counselors about these fairs.
- **Read up on colleges.** Purchase or borrow up-to-date books describing colleges. Request information from, and make a list of the schools that interest you.

**What colleges are you interested in right now?**

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_ 3. \_\_\_\_\_

- **Talk to relatives and friends** who are in college or went to college. Ask what they were looking for in a school, if they found it, and what they would look for today.
- **Plan for the summer.** Look for a job related to your interests, schedule college visits, and review your budget. Summer is also a good time to read and to review math skills in preparation for SAT/ACT tests.

## Parents

- **Consider your income and asset situation.** Aid formulas look at income for “base years.” Remember that your most important base year starts in January of junior year.
- **Plan together with your student** and start researching schools together. Consider making local college visits at this point.

# Grade 11: Fall

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## Students

- **Work closely with your guidance counselor.** Make sure you are taking all of the courses you will need to apply to college. Sign up for advanced level classes whenever possible. Take standardized tests early and often.
- **Continue your extracurricular activities.**

### What activities do you participate in now?

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_ 3. \_\_\_\_\_

- **Keep working at your grades!** Grades are especially important this year. Junior year is the last full year that admissions departments can review on your application and transcript.
- **Register for the PSAT** (Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test) and take it in October. It will give you an idea of your strengths and weaknesses help you prepare for the SAT, and let you see how your scores compare to those of students admitted to the colleges you are considering. An extremely high score may qualify you for the National Merit Scholarship competition.
- **Plan to take the SAT I and SAT II** (Scholastic Aptitude Tests). Find out registration and test dates and make your plans! Students taking tests outside the U.S. need to register early. Students who intend to apply to colleges for Early Decision or Early Action must also plan ahead. Under Early Decision, you agree to attend the school if accepted. Under Early Action (offered by fewer colleges), you are still free to choose another school.

### SAT Resources:

- (1) College Board: Visit [sat.collegeboard.com/home](http://sat.collegeboard.com/home) to signup, practice, view your scores and gain access to other resources.

(2) Quincy Tutoring: For local students (south of Boston), schedule a meeting with Eric Clark and Quincy Tutoring:  
[eric@quincytutoring.com](mailto:eric@quincytutoring.com)

- **Three SAT II Subject Tests** are required by many colleges. The SAT II Writing Test is usually one of the three. You may decide to take two subject tests in the spring of junior year and the other during senior year. Choose your subjects early. Tests should be taken as soon as possible after completing a related course. You may take up to three subject tests on one day. Not all tests are offered on every test date. You may take more than three on several test dates and report the best ones to colleges.
- **The ACT Test** (American College Testing assessment test) is an alternative to the SAT. Most students who take it are from the South and the Midwest. If this test is made available to you, check to make sure your chosen colleges accept it. Most colleges do.
- **Get to know your teachers.** Down the line, you will need a teacher or two to write you a recommendation letter. Get to know the teachers that you like and build a relationship with them. At some point, they will recommend you as more than just a student, and by getting to know them; you will in turn receive a better recommendation.
- **Attend college fairs.** Meet with college representatives who visit your school.
- **Continue collecting college information.** Decide which features are most important to you—location, academic quality, size, fields of study, cost, type, etc. Refine your list of colleges that interest you. You may start with a list of 15 colleges and eventually apply to three or six schools.
- **Plan College visits.** Do research ahead of time. Make a list of questions that aren't answered in the literature. Find out when tours are scheduled. If possible, make an appointment for an interview. If you can visit while college is in session, you will get a better feel for the atmosphere on campus. You may even be able to sit in on a class or two.

## Parents

- Continue planning with your student in this important year.
- **Attend financial aid information nights at school.** Review financial aid forms. Begin collecting financial data. Remember, your family's income for the year starting January 1 will be viewed by financial aid formulas—it's your first "base year."



# Grade 11: Winter

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## Students

- **Talk to relatives and friends** who are in college or went to college. Ask if they have suggestions for you. Continue doing your own college research, and make a list of your thoughts, questions and impressions.
- **If your PSAT scores were low** compared to SAT scores at colleges that interest you, study to improve in areas of weakness. Again, visit the College Board or consider signing up for tutoring classes with Quincy Tutoring.
- **Register in February for the March SAT I test.**
- **If you're interested in a federal military academy**, begin planning your application process. Take the SAT I and SAT IIs this year.
- Stay in touch with your guidance counselor.
- **Plan College visits.** Find out schedules for tours and information sessions.

# Grade 11: Spring and Summer

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## Students

- **Register in March for the May SAT I and SAT II tests or in April for the June SAT I and SAT II tests**, unless you have already taken the tests and are satisfied with your scores.
- **Take the tests!**
- **Look into private scholarships**, and obtain application forms.
- **If you're in Advanced Placement courses, take your AP tests in May.** High scores can earn you college credit and/or advanced standing.
- **Talk with seniors** about the colleges they chose to apply to and why.
- **Meet with your guidance counselor.** Plan senior year courses with college and graduation requirements in mind.
- **Think about how you will present yourself in applications and interviews.**
- **For Early Decision or Early Action**, gather your forms now.
- **Apply for nomination to a military academy**, if this interests you.
- **Check summer application deadlines to apply early for a four-year ROTC scholarship**, if interested.
- **Make spring trips to colleges and plan summer trips.** Schedule interviews far in advance, if they're available.

- **Look for summer employment, internships, or other opportunities.** Colleges will be interested in how you spent your summer, and it's a chance to learn and have fun.
- **Review your SAT scores.** Summer is a great time to upgrade math and subject skills for future tests.

## Grade 12: Fall

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### Students

- **Meet with your guidance counselor to plan courses, schedule tests, and discuss college choices.** Parents should be involved.
- **Plan remaining college visits.** Make appointments for any remaining interviews. If possible, schedule an overnight visit to stay in a dorm and attend a few classes.
- **Decide which colleges are most interesting to you.** Make a side-by-side list of features, then decide which are most important. Narrow the list. Include at least one school you feel confident will admit you, and at least one school that would be affordable even if financial aid were low.

**Safety school:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Affordable school:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Reach school:** \_\_\_\_\_

- **Prepare a college file for admissions materials, and another for financial aid materials.**
- **Call or send for applications and forms right away.** This can often be done online.
- **Make a list of deadlines for admissions and financial aid applications.**
- **Look over admissions applications early.** If essays are required, allow yourself time to think about them and to write them well.
- **Find out what recommendations you need.** Ask teachers, employers, guidance counselors, etc. Whether they are willing to write them for you, and provide them with forms, envelopes, and a brief description of your academic record and activities, if necessary. Be sure to thank them.

## Early Application and Action

- If you are applying for Early Action or Early Decision, complete your application materials now. Most college deadlines for these programs are in November or December.
- **Register for and take the fall SAT I and/or SAT II tests**, whether taking them for the first time or repeating them to try to improve your score:

**Register for the SAT**  
Test dates, registration information and more

**Register Now**

**Upcoming U.S. SAT and SAT Subject Test™ test dates**

*Deadlines expire at midnight, EST (U.S.A.).*

SAT Dates	SAT Subject Tests Available	Register-By Date*	Late Registration*		Changes By*	Register
			Mail	Phone/Online		
<b>Mar 12</b> <a href="#">Study plan</a>		<b>Feb 11</b>	<b>Feb 25</b>	<b>Feb 25</b>	<b>Feb 23</b> <a href="#">Learn how</a>	Deadline passed! <a href="#">Learn about standby testing</a>
<b>May 7</b> <a href="#">Study plan</a>	<a href="#">Subject Tests</a>	<b>Apr 8</b> <a href="#">Reminder</a>	<b>Apr 22</b>	<b>Apr 22</b>	<b>Apr 20</b> <a href="#">Learn how</a>	<a href="#">Register Now</a> 36 days left

- Obtain the FAFSA (Federal aid form) or prepare to file the FAFSA online. If you are also required to submit the PROFILE aid form, prepare to file online. Get copies of any other necessary aid forms. Start to compile financial information early, so that you can be among the first to file aid forms. The FAFSA can be filed after the first of January.

\*Many families make mistakes on the FAFSA by rushing through the process. The [College Planning Group](#) has years of experience filling out the FAFSA and saving money for families going through the college process.

- If ROTC is available at your colleges and you are interested, check into fall deadlines for four-year ROTC scholarships.
- Males between the ages of 18 and 25 must register with the Selective Service. The FAFSA federal aid form asks whether you have registered and provides a box to request automatic registration.
- **Keep up with grades**, activities, and volunteer work.
- **Attend college fairs** and financial aid information programs. Meet with college representatives who visit your school. Ask questions.
- Let your guidance counselor know that you appreciate the work he or she is doing for you.

## Admission Applications

- Make your **final choice of colleges**.

- **Apply for admission!** Be sure to keep records of your application materials.

**Track the progress of your applications:**

SCHOOL	<i>Circle</i>		<i>Check Appropriate Result Box</i>			
	APPLIED?		ACCEPTED	WAIT-LIST	DEFERRED	DENIED
	Y	N				
	Y	N				
	Y	N				
	Y	N				
	Y	N				
	Y	N				
	Y	N				
	Y	N				
	Y	N				
	Y	N				

## Grade 12: Winter

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### Aid Application

- Family income tax returns should be prepared as early as possible. Many colleges ask for copies of tax returns. An estimate may suffice until the tax filing date.
- **Complete your FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) as soon as possible after January first. Make a copy for your records.**
- Complete your PROFILE (private college aid form) and/or other required financial aid application forms in time to meet deadlines. **Keep copies** of everything.
- Review the SAR (Student Aid Report), which should be sent to you within a month after your FAFSA is filed. If any corrections are needed, make them and send the document back to the processor.

## Exams

- Register for and take the SAT I and/or SAT II tests.
- Register for Advanced Placement Exams if you have taken AP courses.

## Transcript Preparation

- Have your midyear transcripts sent to colleges.

## Scholarships

- Look into private scholarships and other funds that may be available to you. Obtain application forms. Make a list of deadlines. Complete and submit scholarship applications.

## Parents

- Parents of Dependent Students: get ready for your first college bill. Pay down any credit card bills and give yourself as much cash flow freedom as possible. The first bill may be due in July and cover the first semester. Some schools offer monthly payment arrangements.

# Grade 12: Spring-Summer

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- **Send copies of tax returns to financial aid offices**, if required.
- **Apply for private scholarships with spring deadlines.**
- **Keep your grades up.** Colleges will ask for your final transcript.
- **Take AP tests**, if you have taken AP courses.
  
- **Review and open your letters from colleges.** Compare financial aid awards.

## Choose which college to attend!

- The reply date is usually May 1. Notify the school that you choose and send your admission deposit. Let other schools know that you will not be attending, so that they may give your place and aid funds to another student. Aid awards must be accepted in order to hold them. If your aid

award is such that you expect significant difficulty in meeting costs, communicate with the school's financial aid office.

- **Ask your guidance counselor to send your final transcript to your chosen school.**
- **Thank your counselor and those who gave you recommendations.** Tell them about your plans.
- **Look into student and parent loans. Apply for loans,** and expect the first college bill.

## Graduate from High School!



## Freshman Year and Beyond

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To continue receiving financial aid, you must file application forms for every year of postsecondary education. Your copies of first-year application forms will help you with renewal forms for the years that follow.

### Was this timeline helpful?

Connect with the [College Planning Group on Facebook](#) for more college planning resources